

# UNCLASSIFIED

## Two-gun Milt February 8

The recent movie *The Post* has revived interest in *The Pentagon Papers*. In the late 1960s, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara commissioned an academic study of how the United States got involved in Vietnam. This unvarnished study included full-text copies of many original documents relating to the war.

In the early 1970s, as anti-Vietnam War feelings grew across the country, a former government official, Daniel Ellsberg, secretly copied the study and smuggled it out of secure spaces. He gave a copy to a *New York Times* reporter, who published a series of articles based on them starting in June 1971, until the Nixon Administration got a court injunction forcing the newspaper to stop. The study acquired the nickname *The Pentagon Papers*.

The Center for Cryptologic History condemns all leaks of classified information, no matter how well-intended the motive. However, this event happened, and we must understand it. Here, we tell of a side-story to the release of *The Pentagon Papers* that involved NSA.

In his memoirs, *New York Times* journalist Harrison Salisbury recalled an unusual incident during the controversy over his newspaper's publication of the *Papers*. While the case was before the court, the White House arranged to send a representative to discuss with the editor of the *Times* the inadvisability of such publication. Since much of the material in question was cryptologic, an NSA official was chosen to be the administration's representative. Reluctantly, officials at the *Times* agreed and arranged a meeting in a private room at the New York Bar Association building. The *Times* personnel referred to the NSA official as the "Top Spook."

As Salisbury recalled it, the Top Spook arrived, with a bodyguard, and met the senior official of the *Times*. The newspaperman recalled (incorrectly) that both the bodyguard and Top Spook carried two guns, and it was his belief the bodyguard had orders to shoot his companion should there be a kidnapping attempt.

UNCLASSIFIED

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In the meeting, the Top Spook assured the *Times* officials that his mission was apolitical and not related to a cover-up of alleged misdeeds. However, the Top Spook stated that certain sections might very well expose U.S. intelligence capabilities, which were important to maintain as secret, and which might otherwise “disabuse foreign governments [about] the security of their communications.” One *Times* official asked whether publication would endanger U.S. codes (one of the administration’s arguments before the court), to which the Top Spook replied, “Hell, no.”

Years later, while writing the *Pentagon Papers* section of his autobiography, Harrison Salisbury asked the *Times* official involved to check his original notes and see if the Top Spook's name was available. It was. The Top Spook was “Milton Zaslow, Deputy Director, Office of Production of the National Security Agency.”



Milton Zaslow in 1959, receiving an award from the DIRNSA, LTG John Samford, USAF. Honestly, does this man look like a gunfighter to you?

Milton Zaslow was born in 1921 in New York City and graduated from the College of the City of New York in 1942, with majors in history and economics. After studying Asian languages at New York University, he enlisted in the army in 1943. Following training, Zaslow was assigned to the Pacific Joint Intelligence Center. He served with the 2nd

and 4th Marine Divisions in the Tinian operation and with XXIV Corps during the Okinawa invasion as a combat intelligence officer. At war's end, he was one of the first Americans to enter Japan as part of a Navy technical intelligence mission, just two weeks after the A-bombs were dropped.

## UNCLASSIFIED

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At the end of World War II, Captain Zaslow returned to the U.S. and got an assignment to the Army Security Agency, one of NSA's predecessors, as a linguist who knew both Chinese and Japanese. He converted to civilian status in 1946 and joined the Armed Forces Security Agency when it was formed in 1949. In 1950 Zaslow, along with several other Chinese linguists, developed information from public access communications in the People's Republic of China that revealed the movement of a large force of Chinese troops to the Korean-Manchurian border. This was a strong indication that the PRC intended to intervene in the Korean War.

From 1961 through 1963, Zaslow was deputy chief, then chief, NSA Pacific. Upon his return, he became chief of the organization responsible for China, followed by assignment, in 1965, as deputy chief, B Group. Three years later he became chief, B. After some staff assignments, he assumed the reins of A Group in 1973, making Milton Zaslow one of only a few persons to lead both the Far East and Soviet groups at NSA. Zaslow also was chief of the group reporting on Vietnam during the war.

In 1969 the DIRNSA, Admiral Noel Gayler, assigned him as the first NSA/CSS representative at the Pentagon. He continued his service as deputy assistant director for production (predecessor of the signals intelligence organization) from 1970 to 1973. Zaslow was the Special U.S. Liaison Officer, London, from 1975 through 1978. He completed his career at NSA as deputy director for telecommunications and computer services (DDT) in 1980.

But it is as “Top Spook” that Milton Zaslow is known outside NSA.

Zaslow reviewed Harrison Salisbury's autobiography and challenges several key facts in the “Top Spook” episode. He undertook the mission to New York to protect some COMINT successes that might be undermined if *The Pentagon Papers* were published in full. During his conversations with the *Times* officials, Zaslow proposed several different methods that would allow him (as an expert on Vietnam and on communications intelligence) to inspect the papers and advise the Times on ways to “sanitize” them. However, the newspaper officials were not responsive to any of these proposals.

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And the two guns? Zaslow's companion was a courier, not a bodyguard. Zaslow had gone to New York under the misunderstanding that there was a possibility the Times might give him copies of *The Pentagon Papers* to take back to Washington for review. Since the government still considered those papers classified and since regulations of the time required that classified material be carried by an armed courier, Zaslow's companion was packing. But, as Milt recalled, the courier "had one, and I had none." (And, it should be emphasized, the courier absolutely had no orders to shoot Zaslow in the event of a kidnapping attempt).

Milton Zaslow retired in 1979. He was made a member of the Cryptologic Hall of Honor in 2007; he passed away in 2008.

This article was based on the competing recollections of Harrison Salisbury and Milton Zaslow.

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